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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 003637

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE
TREASURY FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS - CPLANTIER AND MMILLS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S EU EFFORT PLAGUED BY LOW MORALE,

BUREAUCRATIC SKEPTICISM

REF: A. ANKARA 3105

1B. ANKARA 3565

1C. ANKARA 1231

Classified by CDA Nancy McElroy; reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) Summary: Top GOT leaders insist publicly that the rejection of the EU Constitution in France and the Netherlands will not affect Turkey's EU candidacy, though our MFA contacts concede that recent events in Europe have sapped morale. The GOT's recently-appointed lead EU negotiator must organize his negotiating team, and he may become overwhelmed by the burden of leading the EU talks while maintaining his position as Economy Minister. We agree with contacts who tell us that the GOT has failed to lead the EU accession effort over the past several months. Our contacts say that a majority of bureaucrats opposes EU membership. End Summary.

GOT Battling Low Morale on EU Front

12. (U) PM Erdogan, FM Gul, and other high-level GOT officials have repeatedly insisted in public that the rejection of the EU Constitution by French and Dutch voters was only marginally influenced by fears over Turkey's possible EU membership, and that the referenda results will not affect Turkey's accession process (reftel A). They have sought to assure the public that both Turkey and the EU are prepared to begin accession talks on schedule in October.

13. (C) Our contacts at the MFA and the Secretariat General for EU Affairs also assure us that the GOT is pressing ahead on the EU front. But they acknowledge that Turkish morale has been sapped by the "No" votes on the EU Constitution, as well as the strong possibility that Angela Merkel, Turkey skeptic and president of Germany's Christian Democratic Union Party, will emerge victorious in the upcoming German elections. "There have been some ill effects, I won't deny that," said Ahmet Acet, Deputy Secretary General of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs. "There is a strong sense

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of disappointment."

14. (C) Acet is concerned about the constant "murmuring" coming from Europe, and reflected in the Turkish press, about the possibility of postponing the opening of Turkey's accession talks. He noted that these comments are generally coming from media pundits and European government officials not directly involved with EU enlargement; European Commission President Barroso and Enlargement Commissioner Rehn have made it clear that talks will begin on schedule. He expects the talks to start on time, but believes the constant barrage of negative comments will cast a dark cloud over the proceedings.

15. (C) Acet noted that even Barroso has contributed to Turkish anxieties. The Commission President told a reporter during a June 17 press conference that the EU "should seriously discuss the signals that we have had from the electorate regarding Turkey," a vague comment that Acet said many in the GOT view as an ominous sign of trouble on the horizon. As reported reftel B, Acet and his colleagues fear that trouble could come in the form of tough language in the EU's upcoming Framework for Negotiations with Turkey.

Negotiator Needs to Organize Team

16. (C) Our European contacts also believe that the EU, despite the recent turmoil, will stick to the October 3 start date for talks. But how prepared is the GOT? Kaya Turkmen, MFA DDG for EU Affairs, told us that Economy Minister Babacan, whom Erdogan named as lead EU negotiator in May, must decide how to organize his negotiating team. The State Planning Organization (SPO), one of several economic policy agencies, has clashed with the Secretariat General for EU affairs over which agency should play the leading role in the EU accession process.

17. (C) Turkmen and Acet say Babacan is likely to favor the Secretariat General, which is under his authority, over the

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SPO, which reports to Deputy PM Sener. Moreover, both argue that SPO officials lack diplomatic skills and knowledge of the EU. However, they say SPO expertise will be necessary for the accession process, and Babacan will have to incorporate the agency into the process. MFA and the Secretariat General have jointly submitted to Babacan a

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proposed arrangement under which Babacan would be supported by four deputies -- the head of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs, the MFA Deputy Undersecretary in charge of EU affairs, the GOT's EU Permrep, and the SPO Undersecretary.

Babacan May Be Overwhelmed by Dual Role

18. (C) Erdogan has said Babacan will retain his position as Economy Minister while leading the EU negotiations. It is not clear that he can handle both tasks. A UK diplomat told us members of the Turkey-EU Parliamentary Commission were irritated when Babacan failed to attend a June 13 Commission meeting in Istanbul, reputedly because he was occupied with IMF matters. Acet told us he discussed this issue with Babacan, who insisted that his IMF-related duties will soon decrease (Note: The track record suggests otherwise: at every IMF review, new and difficult issues emerge, often when politicos try to push through populist measures that the IMF cannot accept. End Note).

Reforms Proceed On Paper, ImplementationLags

19. (C) Despite the uncertainty at the top, Acet and Turkmen insist that the Turkish bureaucracy has been steadily preparing for the start of accession talks, working behind the scenes in ways not reflected in the press. Acet cited new draft laws on foundations and the establishment of a government ombudsman as examples of continuing reform efforts (Note: The EU has deemed the foundations law draft inadequate. End Note).

10. (C) Acet conceded that the GOT has had difficulty implementing legal reforms, and "adjusting mindsets" among law enforcement and judicial officials. Despite a broad, EU-funded Justice Ministry program to train judges and prosecutors in EU law and GOT reform, judicial authorities often act against the spirit of the reforms. Prosecutors are still opening "harassment cases" against people for controversial speech that should be protected, he said. But Acet averred that such incidents are declining, and will decline further over time. He said the GOT needs to find more effective ways to ensure that reforms on paper lead to real change on the street.

Most Bureaucrats Oppose EU Membership

11. (C) Other contacts are more skeptical about the sincerity of the GOT's EU-related reform effort. Ayse Saadet Arikan, director general of the Justice Ministry's General Directorate for EU Affairs, told us that top GOT officials, despite their public commitment to EU accession, have shown no leadership on EU reforms in many months. In the past, the GOT used to hold interministerial meetings immediately after each EU Summit and Regular Report to coordinate efforts to address issues raised by the EU. However, she said, the GOT has not held any such meeting since the October 2004 Regular Report and December 2004 Summit. As a result, each ministry is left on its own to decide how to proceed.

12. (C) Moreover, Arikan has told us that a majority of the officials at Justice oppose EU membership, and many say so openly. Contacts at the European Commission office in Ankara tell us they have noticed the same anti-EU sentiment at Justice and other ministries. The Danish DCM told us that

Ambassador Sungar, head of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs, told a visiting Dutch delegation that only approximately 30 percent of MFA officials favor EU membership. Arikan said Justice Ministry bureaucrats systematically block her efforts to amend regulations to conform to EU requirements.

Comment

¶13. (C) Events both in Turkey and in the EU over the past six months have dramatically eroded the sense of optimism that had inspired many to hope that EU accession would, over time, serve as a catalyst to solve Turkey's various, long-unresolved conflicts. The recent anti-EU backlash and increasingly nationalistic tone of the GOT has revealed that Turkey's reform accomplishments, while wide, have been shallow, remaining for the most part on paper. The GOT's goal, for the moment, is a modest one: to make it to October 3 without a major crisis that could derail negotiations. At that point, any further progress will depend largely on the GOT's ability to inspire the bureaucracy, and the public, to embrace EU reform as a benefit to Turkey.

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